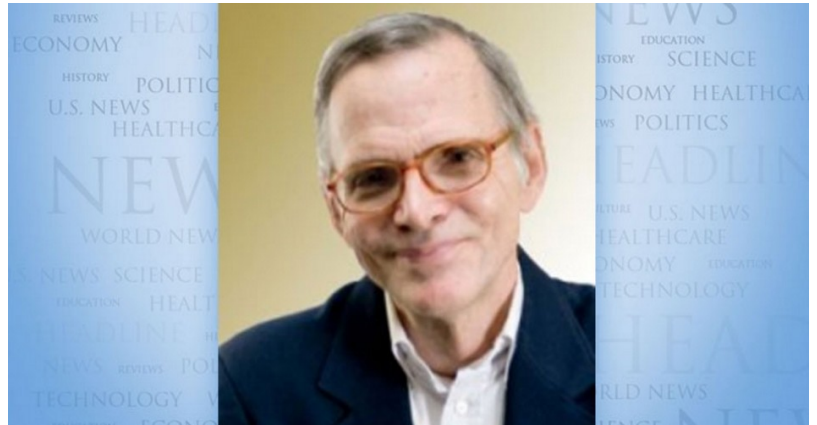




Written by [Jack Kenny](#) on September 8, 2014

It's a Voting Booth, Not a Betting Window

Tuesday, September 9, is Primary Day in many states, and in non-presidential elections, voter turnout tends to be light in November and lighter still on a late summer afternoon or early evening, when millions of Americans, from sea to shining sea, gladly forego the right to vote in exchange for another hour on the golf course, or at the backyard pool or patio, or another ride on the sit-down lawn mower before leaves fall and frost follows.



The good news about a low turnout is that it creates an opportunity for people committed to the ideal of a government that defends our unalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness to enjoy increased leverage over the outcome. We can do that, however, only if we vote for candidates dedicated to those same principles, and not necessarily for those who are leading in the polls, are most telegenic or “charismatic,” or are the candidates the party bosses tell us “can win” in November. Candidates who fit one or more of those categories over the years include Tom Dewey, Bob Dole, and Mitt Romney — to name but a few. All were hailed by the party establishment as men who could beat the opposition in November. All were duds on the campaign trail and runners up on Election Day. Gracious losers, to be sure, but losers just the same.

Time and again we have seen the party leaders back a candidate in a primary not because of merit or devotion to any principle espoused in a party platform, but because they perceived their candidate to be the more “electable” choice in November. When conservative, pro-life Rep. Pat Toomey challenged renegade, “pro-choice” Republican Arlen Specter in a Senate primary in Pennsylvania in 2004, the party establishment, including President Bush, Vice President Cheney, and the state’s junior senator and pro-life champion Rick Santorum, all backed the incumbent Specter for his ability to attract those “moderate” voters who presumably would shun Toomey. Specter eked out a victory over Toomey and did indeed win reelection that November. But how did that work out for the Grand Old Party? The five-term Republican switched parties in the end and cast the deciding vote for ObamaCare before losing to Rep. Joe Sestak in a Democratic primary in 2010. Sestak was then defeated by the “unelectable” Pat Toomey, now the state’s junior senator.

When political novice Rand Paul ran for U.S. Senate in Kentucky in 2010, Mitch McConnell, the state’s senior senator and the Republican leader in the Senate, led the rally of the party elders behind Trey Grayson, Kentucky’s secretary of state and the supposedly more electable and “moderate” alternative to Paul, the favorite of Tea Party activists. Paul took 59 percent of the vote against Grayson and handily defeated Democrat Jack Conway, the state’s attorney general, in November. The problem with pragmatism, it has been said, is that it doesn’t work.

“A Republic, if you can keep it,” was the storied reply of Ben Franklin in 1787, when asked what the delegates had created at their secret conclave in Philadelphia. If the act of voting is to retain some connection to the preservation of liberty in a constitutional Republic, then voters must not regard the voting booth as democratic government’s two-dollar window at the race track, choosing a candidate



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solely on the basis his or her odds of winning. Americans who wish to keep the Republic must vote for candidates devoted to the principles of liberty.

Among these, the signers of the Declaration declared, are “Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.” Liberty and the pursuit of happiness become academic when the right to life is denied. At a time when we are rightly revolted and outraged by the beheading of innocent Americans by terrorists overseas, we cannot, morally or logically, be indifferent to the butchering of babies in the womb by abortionists here at home. There are “pro-choice” candidates in both parties who may boast of their accomplishments in the private sector or in years of public service. But when some 4,000 babies are dismembered and discarded each day in the United States, it is a grotesque mockery of tolerance or moderation to say that while Candidate X, Y, or Z may defend the legal “right” to the deliberate, planned destruction of innocent human life, he or she is otherwise a fine upstanding citizen who will make a splendid governor or senator or representative.

“For evil to succeed,” in the memorable words of Edmund Burke, “it is only necessary that good men do nothing.” That is exactly what most Americans will do on Primary Day. Those of us who do exercise the franchise must do it conscientiously, in a way that will make a difference.

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